

DISTROHOPPER

Our pick of the latest releases will whet your appetite for new Linux distributions.

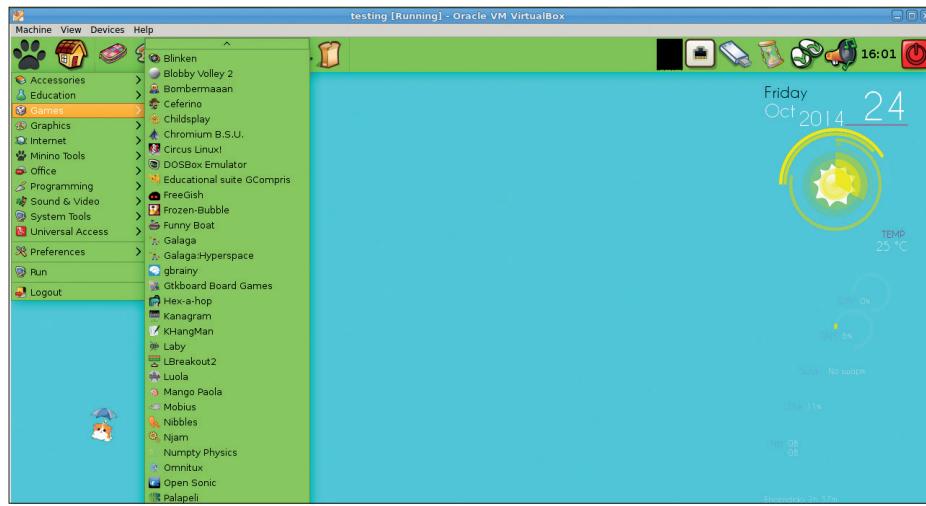
Picaros Diego

Linux for children.

There are a few distributions aimed at children: Doudou springs to mind, and there's also Sugar on a Stick. Both of these are based on the idea that you need to protect children from the complexities of the computer (and protect the computer from the children). Picaros Diego is different. There's nothing stripped-down or shielded from view. Instead, it's a normal Linux distro with a brighter, more kid-friendly interface.

The desktop wallpaper perhaps best exemplifies this. On one hand, it's a colourful cartoon image designed to interest young children. Some of the images on the landscape are icons for games, and this should encourage children to investigate the system rather than just relying on menus. On the other hand, it still displays technical details such as the CPU usage and the RAM and Swap availability.

It has kids' games and more technical software such as the *Midnight Commander*



We were too busy playing *Secret Mario* on Picaros Diego to write a witty or interesting caption.

file manager. In the programming category, we were slightly disappointed to discover it only had Gambas (a Visual Basic-like language), and not more popular teaching languages like Scratch or a Python IDE. However, it's based on Debian, so you do have the full range of software available through **apt-get**, so this isn't a problem.

The project website lists it as suitable for children aged three to 12. We think three is a

little young for a system like this, but the it may well work for children on the upper end of that age range.

Overall, we like the philosophy of wrapping Linux in a child-friendly package, but not dumbing it down. Picaros Diego won't work for every child, but if you have a budding geek in your midst, it could be the distro to bridge the gap between highly simplified toy distros and normal operating systems.

BackBox

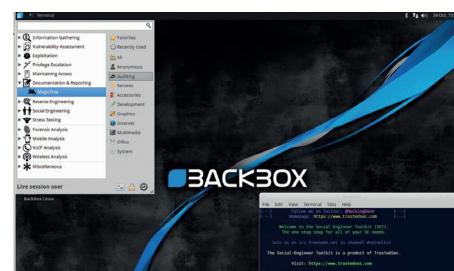
Penetration testing never looked so lovely.

BackBox is a distro for people interested in computer security (call them whatever you like: crackers, hackers, penetration testers or annoying sods who cause you to have to deal with selinux). It's based on Ubuntu with a customised LXDE graphical environment, and a whole lot of tools to help you crack, sidestep or otherwise bypass security measures. There are also additional tools for pentesters such as the *MagicTree* reporting software.

As is customary in pen testers' distros, the applications menu includes all of these tools

even though they're command line-based, and clicking on them brings up a terminal window with the help text of the tool. This might seem a little strange to people used to regular Linux distributions, but it makes it much easier to get started with the tools. Especially if – like this author – you have a terrible memory for commands you only use occasionally.

We're relative newcomers to Backbox, but it's quickly becoming our favourite penetration testing environment. It looks nice, it's easy to use, it's got the full set of Ubuntu software available (you can add



For most of the time we've known about this distro, we've been pronouncing it Blackbox. We apologise to all concerned.

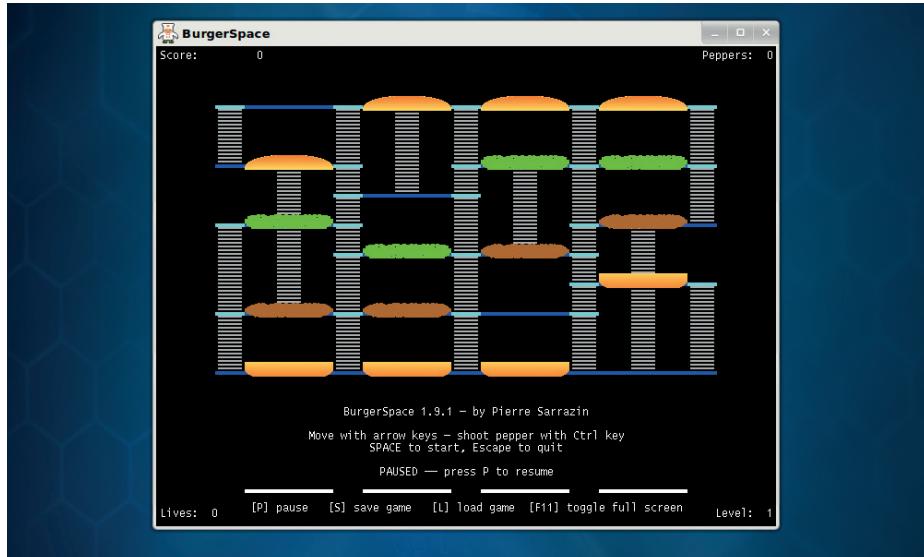
PPAs for just about anything) and it's lightweight. If you're completely new to this field, you might be better off with Kali, as there's more support for this distro, but if you're fairly familiar with Linux, you shouldn't have any trouble at all with Backbox.

Netrunner Rolling Release

A surprise find on our torrent server.

We're running a Torrent server at Linux Voice, partly to help take some of the bandwidth load off individual distro projects, but also because it provides us with a useful insight into what's popular at the moment. One of the surprise successes has been Netrunner Rolling Release. After Knoppix (see below) and Tails, the distro for the privacy-conscious, it has the highest share ratio of any of the distros we're hosting. Share ratios are an odd statistic (they provide a rough indication of the number of times something has been uploaded), and aren't an accurate representation of popularity. Still, this is a high position for a relatively unknown distro.

The main version of Netrunner is based on Kubuntu, while the rolling version is based on Manjaro (and by extension, Arch). This means that underneath, there's quite a lot of difference between the two, even though they both carry the Netrunner name. Both have a great KDE interface – not just the usual defaults, but an interface that's been crafted to look nice out the box – but below this they have little in common.



Netrunner Rolling also comes with a few games such as *BurgerSpace* to help you unwind after a stressful upgrade by smashing hamburgers.

Firefox in Netrunner comes with Adblock plus installed, and DownloadHelper (an extension to help you grab images and videos to watch later). It's little tweaks like these that make using Netrunner pleasant.

There's space for distros that package the vanilla versions of software, but we prefer it when distro maintainers put their personal stamp on the software and help the user get set up with a good system.

Knoppix The original live Linux distro is still going strong

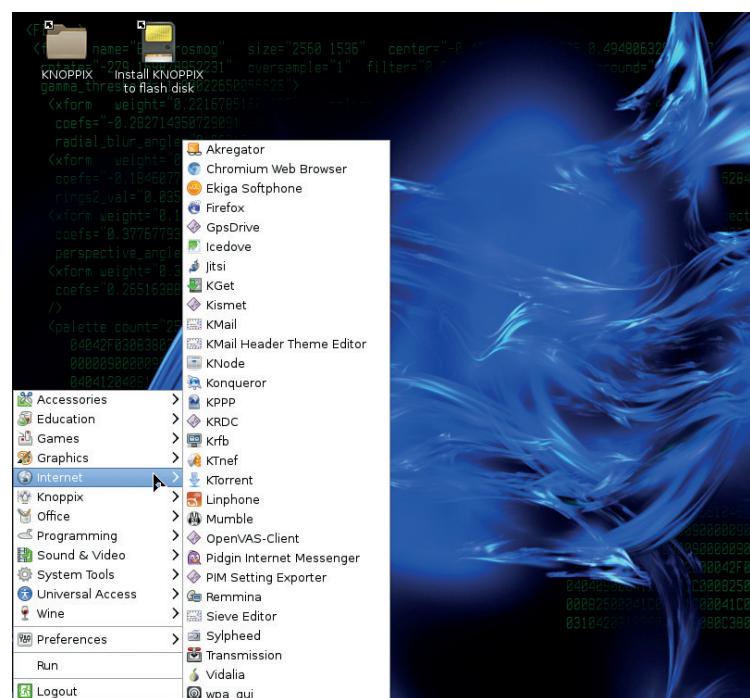
There was a time – far back in the distant past – when you couldn't try Linux without installing a distro. Then along came Knoppix, with the revolutionary concept of running Linux directly from a DVD without installing anything, and the live distro was born.

These days, of course, almost every distro comes as a live CD (or DVD) that you can try before installing directly from the live session. So is there still a place for a live-only distro like Knoppix?

Absolutely! The simple reason is that while many distros can run live, most aren't designed to do so as a matter of course. Knoppix is. This means that it comes with a walloping bundle of software that should be sufficient for almost any situation. For example, it comes with everything you should need to get online on almost any type of connection. ISDN line? Fine. 3G dongle? No problem. Need to start an SSH server? Included. In fact, it's hard to find an area that Knoppix doesn't come with software for. It can help you recover a broken machine, or operate as a main operating system in a machine with no hard drive.

With a live distro, you're also stuck with the look and feel that comes pre-configured (unless you want to make changes every time you reboot). This means it's that even more important than normal that it looks good. Knoppix has a slightly unusual combination of LXDE (usually known for its minimalism) and some pretty heavy graphical effects that we're more used to seeing on KDE. However, the end result is an nice looking desktop that should run reasonably on most hardware.

Knoppix is one of those distros that you should always have a copy of, because sometime, probably when you'll least expect it, it'll get you out of a sticky situation.



The Knoppix desktop might be a little unorthodox, but it works well.